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Evaluation of eZ Publish 5.0

By: Tony White



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eZ Publish 5 Platform Product Evaluation

By: Tony White

Date: January 7, 2013

ARS LOGICA

ARS LOGICA POSITION

eZ Publish 5.0 is a first-rate enterprise WCM platform which – in combination with other eZ Systems offerings – can serve as a solid foundation for CXM initiatives. The product has evolved significantly in the past year, the biggest improvements coming in usability (new UI), flexibility (new API), and a newly-available marketing automation extension. Although open source, eZ Publish stands on a level with the best of the commercial WCM offerings. The platform's main weakness is eZ Systems' inadequate product marketing, which accounts for much of the market's relative unawareness of the product or its quality.

NOTES & RESOURCES

Compass Guide Vendor Questionnaire

Some company and product information contained in this report was collected via Ars Logica's 172-item Vendor Questionnaire. Vendor responses were always independently verified through customer interviews, implementation monitoring, Ars Logica's comprehensive knowledge base, and hands-on product testing.

Product Testing

Ars Logica has evaluated eZ Publish numerous times, from v. 4.2 in June 2009 to v. 5.0 in October 2012. These testing and demo sessions have addressed all criteria in our use-case test scenarios.

Customer Interviews

Ars Logica has interviewed users of every product covered in the Compass Guide, including eZ Publish.

Implementation Monitoring

Since the 1990s, Ars Logica founder Tony White has kept close tabs on ongoing WCM implementations. Some of this knowledge is represented in the Compass Guide reports.

No Vendor Influence

Ars Logica retains complete editorial control over the Compass Guides and receives no funding in their production.

eZ Systems Vendor Overview

eZ Systems was among the very first of the open source CMS vendors, and from the start, eZ Publish attracted technologists within the publishing industry because of the product's long-standing platform, i.e. highly customizable, approach to managing content. eZ Systems is currently one of the few truly enterprise-scale open source-derived offerings on the market (we say "derived" because of the hybrid open source/commercial Enterprise Edition), and remains one of the more popular choices among large publishers and multimedia companies. Due to the robustness of its development environment, the platform normally requires a substantial time investment at implementation, but the solutions built upon it often represent some of the most unique, highly-interactive Web applications in existence. Over the past year, as eZ Systems has integrated its analytics and personalization acquisitions (odoscope and YOOCHOOSE), the platform has been gaining momentum as a foundation for customer experience management (CXM) initiatives. Worth noting is the platform's availability as both on-premise software or cloud-based solution.

Company Profile

Year Founded: 1999
Headquarters: Skien, Norway; Cologne, Germany
Employees (or FTE equivalents): 100
Geographies: Europe, North America, Asia
Revenue: \$17 million
Product Types Offered: WCM, CXM
Commercial or Open Source: Hybrid open source/commercial
Strategic Implementation Partners: Capgemini, circ IT, EPAM, Ixonos, Novactive, Orange Business Services, Roundarch Isobar (US), SQLI, Smile, ThinkCreative (US)
Top Competitors: Acquia, Adobe, EPiServer, Oracle, Sitecore
Key Vertical Industries: Publishing, Media & Entertainment, Government, Financial Services

Product Profile

Product Name: eZ Publish Platform
Version: 5.0
Next Version Release Date: May 2013
Market Segment: Enterprise
Average Annual Subscription: \$35,000
Average Implementation Cost: \$125,000
Technology Platform: PHP
Key Strengths: Robust developer toolkit, highly-evolved publishing and multi-media solutions, excellent functionality-to-price ratio, suitability for CXM
Key Limitations: Limited market presence, labor intensity of implementation
Highest-Value Use Case: Enterprise WCM deployment with existing or imminent CXM requirements

Vendor History & Product Evolution

Founded in Skien, Norway in 1999, eZ Systems conceived of itself from the beginning as a product company rather than a professional services firm. From early 1999 until November 2000, the vendor worked on the development and launch of eZ Publish 1.0. As is the case with a (very) few other vendors who built their first product with a well-planned design goal in mind, eZ Systems benefitted from developing all components of the platform simultaneously. Thus, the first product was a logical, PHP-based, modular product suite free from the “spaghetti code” syndrome of many contemporaneous pure-play WCM products. For the first few years, eZ Systems grew primarily within Scandinavia. But by 2003-2004, eZ Systems had a significant presence in Germany and France, where it still enjoys its strongest market- and mindshare. 2004 to 2008 witnessed a period of rapid community adoption, which fueled the need for heavy reliance by eZ Systems on its service partners and witnessed the beginnings of the vendor’s own professional services organization. Because of interest in the product platform from midsize to large enterprises, the vendor found that a more “commercial style” services organization was required to provide enterprise-grade partner certification, training, customer support, and so on. In 2008, the company announced such a support offering, and market adoption of this services subscription has been quite strong.

Technically, the product has always been PHP-based. Given that the platform has always been strictly open source, the code base has obviously always been publicly available, and – for the most part – designed in a modular fashion, allowing for straightforward customization and extension. It is worth noting that the intellectual property of the platform has always remained in eZ Systems’ ownership, making it more stable than most other open source offerings. For enterprises with sufficient technical expertise, the wide range of available options for in-house application development has often given eZ Systems a competitive advantage over many of its rivals. As the name suggests, eZ Publish enjoy a strong installed base among publishing organizations; but given the product’s strengths in modular design, extensibility, and customization capabilities, eZ customers have created an extensive library of product extensions that can be leveraged by companies across a wide range of verticals.

Since our last published evaluation of eZ Systems in February 2011 (eZ Publish 4.4), the platform has evolved substantially. The full integration of robust analytics and personalization, complete revamping of the user interface, re-architecting of the API, and maturation of the product extensions available through eZ Systems’ partners, have turned a nearly ready-for-primetime WCM application into an open source CXM offering that promises to be a real inconvenience for the leading commercial vendors – not least because of the ratio of (robust) functionality to (low) price.

Key Recent Developments

The key recent developments in the eZ Publish platform stem from the release of v. 5.0 in November 2012. The most significant of these is likely the full, read-and-write REST API (previously read-only). Of potentially equal importance is the new, more scalable platform architecture. While v. 4.7 generally proved less scalable than its commercial WCM counterparts, v. 5.0 is competitive in this regard. To non-technical users, the revamped UI will rate as one of the two key developments, the other being the availability of eZ Marketing Automation as a product extension. Also of particular significance are the adoption of the Symfony framework, availability of a mobile SDK, and hybrid (on-premise/cloud) delivery options.

Profiling the Ideal Buyer

The ideal buyers of eZ Publish include: (1) publishers and multimedia companies with a need to create highly interactive Web applications, (2) enterprises in any vertical seeking a robust combined WCM-CXM solution, (3) organizations looking to leverage in-house and community-based code development as a means of cost-saving, (4) anyone who realizes the unusually high functionality-to-cost ratio at this point in eZ Systems' evolution.

- **Preference for Open Source**

Because open source and commercial software products are now on a nearly level playing field, the ideal buyer should not only have no bias against open source, but rather a preference for it.

- **Enterprise-Scale Deployment with Combined WCM-CXM Requirements**

eZ Publish's highest value can be derived from combined WCM-CXM implementations.

- **Sufficient Pool of IT Resources**

Implementation and ongoing system administration typically proves labor intensive, and potential buyers should be staffed accordingly.

eZ Publish Will Not Be a Good Fit, If...

eZ Publish is a highly-evolved WCM product technically, with particular strengths in CXM supplied by complementary eZ product offerings. Ars Logica has seen a tight correlation between an organization's knowledge of how technology should support business processes and their satisfaction with eZ Publish. Of course this kind of self-awareness bodes well for the success of any technology implementation, but Ars Logica has never seen a company "luck into" buying eZ Publish as the right CMS for them, as we have from time to time with other content management products. If eZ Publish is right for your company, you should know it with either a "test drive" (download) or vendor proof-of-concept.

Key Product Strengths

eZ Systems has for a number of years provided an enterprise Web platform with exceptional functionality addressing the requirements of complex publishing models. eZ Publish has historically been a good fit for customers whose websites are highly user-interactive and whose requirements are unique. As its name may suggest, eZ Publish has been popular among both traditional and digital publishing houses, such as magazines and newspapers. However, eZ Systems' platform has evolved far beyond a typical publishing product. The eZ platform currently stands as one of the industry's leading WCM systems with regard to analytics, personalization, and cloud feature-functionality. The product's new, full REST API contributes significantly to the platform's suitability as a foundation for CXM initiatives, as its design supports true services-oriented architectures (SOA). And lastly, although the product's marketing automation features (available as an extension in the eZ Marketplace) are competitive with other leading WCM platforms, many enterprise customers will still want to integrate eZ Publish with best-of-breed marketing automation products.

There is a general lack of awareness in the market of the quality of the eZ Publish 5.0 platform. Because of the product's under-pricing, many prospective customers will be tempted to compare the platform to entry-level or mid-tier products. In reality, the product is approaching functional equivalence to other major enterprise WCM systems such as Adobe CQ5 and SDL Tridion.

FIGURE 1 eZ Publish 5.0, Key Product Strengths and Limitations

Below are several key product strengths and limitations that potential buyers should keep in mind when assembling vendor shortlists.

KEY STRENGTHS	KEY LIMITATIONS
Core competency in multi-channel content delivery	Vendor lacks the marketing expertise to communicate its highest value proposition.
Excellent analytics and personalization capabilities	Limited partner network in North America compared to direct competitors
Full REST API (read-and-write, whereas v. 4.7 was read-only)	Implementation can be time- and labor-intensive.
Industry-leading functionality-to-price ratio	
Well-suited to CXM initiatives	

Source: Ars Logica, Inc.

Source of Information: Product testing (October 2012), customer interviews, vendor questionnaire

Key Product Limitations

Typically, when CMS products excel at satisfying complex requirements, implementing them can be time- and labor-intensive. eZ Publish is no exception. That is, to construct a unique, intricate system of any kind, more time is required. Keep in mind that while eZ Publish allows customers to build highly elaborate digital publishing models, it may not be the right product when requirements do not reach this bar.

Again, somewhat related to the product's platform-based approach, product usability can depend heavily upon specific implementation choices. Tools such as eZ Flow, which enables streamlined content authoring, can do so only if business-process choices which support the customer's content authoring model are made at implementation time. In interviews with eZ Systems' customers, Ars Logica has encountered a wide range of usability ratings, which have strongly correlated with the depth of buyers' knowledge of their own requirements before purchasing a CMS system. That said, the redesigned user interface in v. 5.0 dramatically improves usability for non-technical users (from 5.6 to 7.0 out of a possible score of 10 – see Figure 2).

Although a first-rate content management platform, eZ Publish 5.0's suffers from a lack of first-rate product marketing, especially when compared with its better-known peers. Since Ars Logica began covering eZ Systems in 2008, we have seen many instances of companies opting for products with good accompanying marketing collateral over less well-marketed but functionality superior competitors. This phenomenon applies to markets of any kind, but in the content technology market, eZ Systems is very likely the best example. The reasons for this problem are straightforward. The product was born and has thrived in a community-based, open source arena, and has therefore attracted a highly-technical, sometimes marketing-unfettered installed base. Consequently, eZ Systems as a company has operated as a technology-driven organization. Now that the platform has begun generating interest among non-technical business users, eZ Systems is struggling to communicate effectively its highest value proposition to these non-technical folks. This has had a significant negative impact on eZ Systems' win-loss ratio over the past several years as purchase decisions continue migrating to business units. The effect on eZ Systems' market penetration comes from the fact that while IT departments prefer technically superior feature-functionality and platform architectures, they often defer to the purchase decisions of business units who rely to varying degrees (sometimes heavily) on vendors' marketing materials and campaigns.

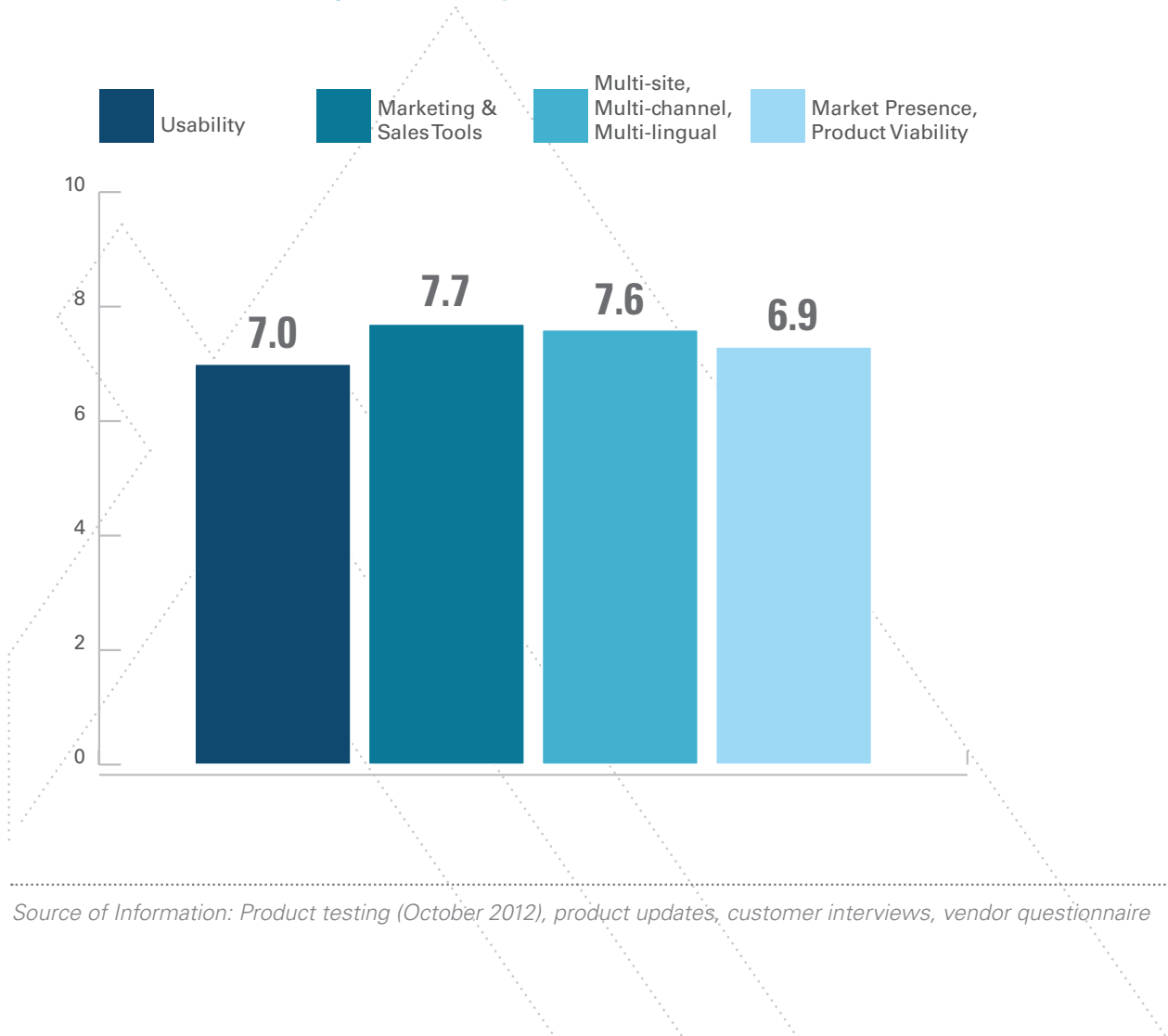
To date, eZ Systems has had no equivalent of a chief marketing officer, and to the best of our knowledge, not even a viable marketing department. This must change in 2013 if eZ Systems hopes to achieve a win-loss ratio commensurate with improvements in the recently-revamped eZ Publish 5.0 platform. And while this holds true worldwide, it is exponentially more critical in North America than elsewhere.

Vendor/Product Report Cards

The features, functions, and technical underpinnings of WCM products vary wildly, as do the customer requirements they are intended to satisfy. For this reason, the only reliable way to assure the best product fit for a particular client is to spend anywhere from several weeks to several months assessing the client's specific needs and analyzing product capabilities line by line. Still, Ars Logica is frequently asked to rate products in categories such as those in Figures 2 and 3.

FIGURE 2 eZ Systems Report Card for the Business User

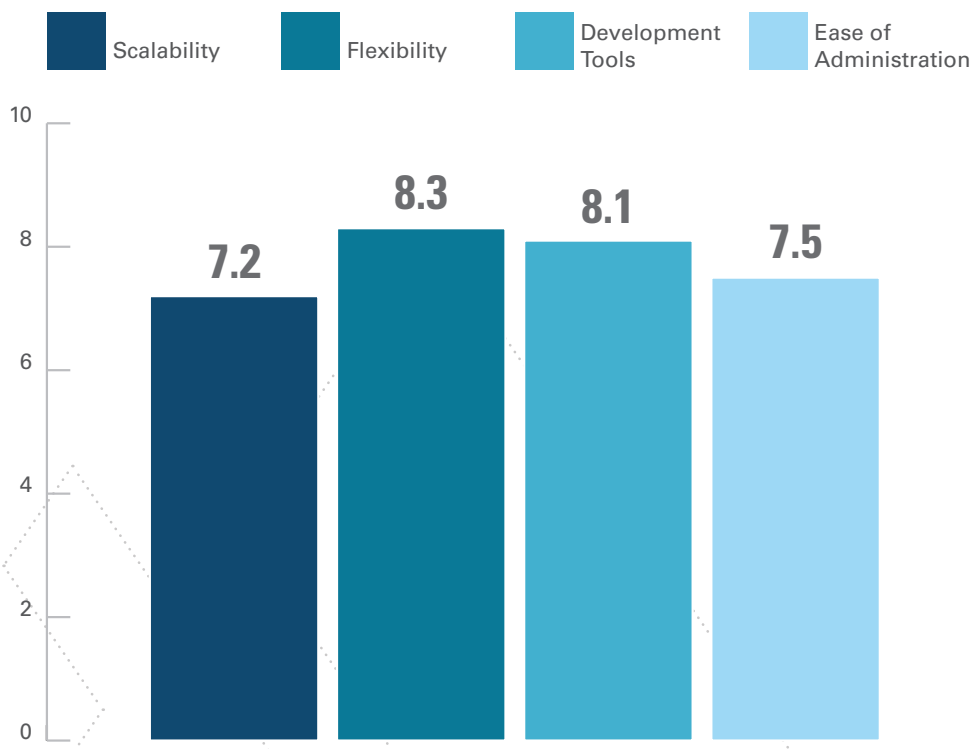
Figure 2 shows Ars Logica's rating of eZ Publish 5.0 in four categories of critical importance to business users. Refer to Page 11 for an explanation of the evaluation criteria.



Source of Information: Product testing (October 2012), product updates, customer interviews, vendor questionnaire

FIGURE 3 eZ Systems Report Card for Technologists

Figure 3 shows Ars Logica's rating of eZ Publish 5.0 in four categories of critical importance to technologists. Refer to Page 12 for an explanation of the evaluation criteria.



Source of Information: Product testing (October 2012), product updates, customer interviews, vendor questionnaire

Report Card Evaluation Criteria

In the process of analyzing WCM solutions, Ars Logica has established a set of evaluation criteria, which at the highest level can be separated into four categories for non-technical business users and four categories for technologists. Scores in these categories represent averages of a large number of detailed criteria, and are meant to be used as a means of quickly comparing products within the same market segment – not as a substitute for painstaking requirements and product matching.

Criteria for Business Users

- **Usability**

Usability refers to the relative ease of learning and using a WCM application. For non-technical business users, factors contributing to high scores in this category include intuitive and consistent user interfaces, streamlined task completion (i.e. minimal number of steps to complete a task), integration with the desktop, contextual editing capabilities, and documented high user adoption rates among a vendor's customers.

- **Marketing & Sales Tools**

Increasingly, enterprises are relying on marketing and sales tools within WCM applications to improve sales conversion rates, increase average transaction amounts, draw customers back to their Web sites, analyze online behavioral patterns, and so on. This category rates the presence and quality of such tools.

- **Multi-Site, Multi-Channel, Multi-Lingual Capabilities**

This category assesses a product's ability to support multiple sites; deliver content to multiple channels on multiple devices; and create, store, present, disseminate, and/or translate content into multiple languages. Scores in this category represent an average of a product's capabilities in all three of these broad functional areas.

- **Market Presence, Product Viability**

The Market Presence, Product Viability category rates both a vendor's overall market presence relative to competitors and its dedication to the continued development of its WCM products. If these two factors are not aligned with each other, an explanation of why will be included.

Criteria for Technologists

- **Scalability**

Scalability refers to the ability of a product to function well as system demands increase. Factors contributing to scalability are database size, query efficiency, bandwidth consumption, ease of system management, caching efficiency, load balancing, and mass content deployment capabilities.

- **Flexibility**

Flexibility denotes a product's ability to integrate easily with existing enterprise infrastructure, including operating systems, Web servers, databases, directories, development tools, and other enterprise applications such as ERP, CRM, document management systems, search, portals, and so forth.

- **Development Tools**

This category describes the quality of a product's integrated development environment (IDE), the technologies that the IDE incorporates, and overall ease of customized application development. Although this category refers primarily to development frameworks (Eclipse, e.g.), other ad hoc tools are also included, such as page templates, HTML/XML editors, WYSIWYG editors, PDF generators, and any other software that enables or eases the production, formatting and dissemination of content.

- **Ease of Administration**

Some WCM products require significantly more work to administer (sometimes 5-10 times more) than others. This category rates the relative resource intensity required to keep the system running smoothly, where higher scores reflect less work. Roughly speaking, higher scores also indicate better coordination of application components due to more methodical system design.



SERVICES

Advisory Services

Ars Logica is a vendor-neutral analyst firm helping companies evaluate their technology requirements and select appropriate software. To address clients' content management-related questions and problems that arise throughout the year, Ars Logica offers unlimited direct analyst access through its Analyst Anytime advisory services. These annual, subscription-based services provide guidance by phone or email within 24 hours on a wide range of issues. The number of inquiries submitted throughout the year is not limited.

Software and Technology Selection

In our software and technology-selection engagements, Ars Logica maps clients' functional, technological, and strategic requirements to potential WCM solutions and identifies the software vendors whose products best satisfy these requirements. We maintain a continuously updated comprehensive matrix of the feature-functionality of most WCM vendors' products and solutions. We also receive frequent briefings from these vendors and have in-depth conversations and consulting engagements with their customers, ensuring that we always understand the actual state of vendors' offerings as well as their forward-looking strategic directions.

Custom Engagements

Ars Logica's expertise in WCM and related technologies such as digital asset management, records management, marketing campaign management, search, and portals, gives us the open-ended ability to help clients on a wide range of projects, including: building internal business cases, assessing technology requirements, analyzing software products and vendors, selecting and assembling software solutions, crafting Web strategies, and running corporate educational seminars. We also assist vendors in developing strategic roadmaps, and we and present our view of the WCM market at industry conferences and end-user events.

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